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E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/28/2031

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SUBJECT: JOURNALISTS, STUDENTS COMMEMORATE "DAY OF THE JOURNALIST"

Classified By: Political Counselor, Robert R. Downes  
for Reason 1.4(d).

¶1. (SBU) Tens of thousands of Venezuelans participated in peaceful demonstrations nationwide on June 27 to commemorate the "Day of the Journalist" and to mark the one-month anniversary of the BRV-imposed shutdown of Radio Caracas Television (RCTV). In Caracas, the National Press Workers' Union organized a sizable demonstration from the "House of the Journalist" to the former headquarters of RCTV. Students from the various city universities participated in the day's activities as well. Many, however, joined the march at varying places and times as final exams were being administered, the students told the local media. Before joining the larger demonstration to RCTV, students from the National Journalism College marched to the Apostolic Nunciature to express their support for University of the Andes student leader Nixon Moreno, who is currently seeking asylum following BRV threats on his life. Political parties also made their presence felt at the event. Zulia state Governor and leader of opposition party Un Nuevo Tiempo Manuel Rosales and party members joined Primero Justicia and Bandera Roja in the demonstration. The peaceful march was temporarily interrupted by a group of Chavistas who crossed the security barrier and allegedly attacked the marchers. The Metropolitan Police removed the attacking group and the march continued to RCTV. Coverage of the event was sparse and uneven as only opposition media outlet Globovision carried the demonstrations live.

¶2. (SBU) Similar pro-democracy activities were organized in other major cities. In San Cristobal, journalists and students marched to local radio and newspaper stations in support of freedom of expression. In Merida and Maracaibo, journalists protested the BRV's decision to revoke RCTV's broadcasting license and the government's ongoing harassment of independent journalists and media outlets. Student protests were also reported in Ciudad Guyana and Puerto Ordaz.

¶3. (SBU) Separately, a much smaller pro-government group called Journalists for Truth held a rally at Plaza Bolivar. The event was presided over by former Vice President Jose Vicente Rangel and National Assembly Second Vice President Desiree Santos Amaral to also mark the "Day of the Journalist." Rangel dismissed the pro-RCTV demonstrators by saying they were "condemned to failure."

¶4. (C) Comment. A month after RCTV's closure, supporters of freedom of expression continue to be able to mobilize

substantial numbers of people to protest the government's action. Interestingly, the horns, noisemakers, and speakers that have characterized the recent pro-democracy marches were noticeably absent from the June 27 activities. Event coordinators called on participants to "reflect" on the BRV attacks on the media, a concept that appears to have resonated with the demonstrators. End Comment.

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